



Basic Definitions for LGBT* Communities (and Allies)

compiled by Cathy Busha

1. **Bisexual:** Type of sexual orientation in which a person is emotionally and sexually attracted to either sex. See *Sexual Orientation*.
2. **Coming Out:** The process by which a person begins to self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, or queer. Coming out can happen over a long or short period of time and at different levels (i.e. people may be out to their friends and not to their families).
3. **Cross Dresser:** A person who enjoys wearing clothes usually associated with the opposite of her/ his assigned sex or gender. Some Cross Dressers may identify as transgender.
4. **Drag:** Stands for (DR)essed (A)s a (G)irl. When a person performs in the clothes or using the mannerisms usually associated with the opposite sex or gender. Most people that do drag do not consider themselves transgender. Drag is usually done for entertainment purposes. There are Drag Queens (men dressing up as women) and Drag Kings (women dressing up as men).
5. **FtM:** A Female-to-Male transsexual. See *Transsexual* and *Transition*.
6. **Gay:** A man who is emotionally, socially, and perhaps sexually attracted to other men. Preferred self-identifier for many homosexual men and women. Also, a term used to describe the GLBT community. See *Sexual Orientation*, *MSM*. Some men who have sex with men do not identify as gay.
7. **Gender:** A social construct. In Western culture, it is typically divided between men and women/masculine and feminine. Behavior, appearance, and societal roles are differently defined for each gender. For most people, gender is their sex made visible.
8. **Gender Identity:** Refers to the way in which people externally communicate their internal, personal sense of gender to others through behavior and appearance. For transgender people, their birth-assigned gender or sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match, and they seek to make their gender expression match their internal identity, rather than their birth-assigned gender or sex. See *Gender*, *Transgender*, and *Transition*.
9. **Hermaphrodite:** Considered a pejorative term, referring to an intersexed person. See *Intersexed*.
10. **Heterosexism:** Belief that heterosexuality is superior or more valid than other sexual orientations. Gives people who follow a more culturally traditional heterosexual lifestyle greater power as well as increased opportunities for legal, medical, economic, and social privilege, assistance, and status.
11. **Heterosexual:** Type of sexual orientation in which a person is emotionally and sexually attracted to the opposite sex (males attracted to females, females attracted to males). See *Sexual Orientation* and *heterosexism*.

12. **Homophobia:** Irrational fear and hatred of homosexuality and anyone who identifies as anything other than heterosexual. Can often be internalized by someone who is having difficulty with her/his own gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation. A direct result of heterosexism. See *Heterosexism* and *Homosexual*.
13. **Homosexual:** Type of sexual orientation in which a person is attracted to the same sex (males attracted to males, females attracted to females). A term originally used by the medical community to “diagnose” people who were not heterosexual. Considered a pejorative to some people who prefer the terms “gay,” “lesbian,” or “queer.” See *Gay*, *Lesbian*, *Queer*, and *Sexual Orientation*.
14. **Intersexed:** People who are born with ambiguous genitalia. Use 'intersexed' rather than 'hermaphrodite.' Intersexed people may or may not identify as transgender or transsexual.
15. **Lesbian** A woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women. Preferred self-identifier for many homosexual women. Can also refer to the community and culture of women who love/are attracted to other women.
16. ***LGBT:** Common abbreviation for (L)esbian, (G)ay, (B)isexual, and (T)ransgender.
17. **MSW** Men who have Sex with Men, but may not identify as gay.
18. **MtF:** A Male-to-Female transsexual. See *Transsexual* and *Transition*.
19. **Sex:**
1. Verb: Consensual, intimate physical contact between adults.
2. Noun: Biologically based (though, some argue socially constructed) determination of a person's label of "female" or "male." Often based on doctor's visual assessment of a baby's genitalia.
20. **Sexual Orientation:** Refers to the identifiers used to describe the kind of sex a person finds attractive. Includes heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. See *Gay* and *Lesbian*. *Transgender is not an indicator of a person's sexual orientation. Transgender people may have a heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual orientation. See *Gender Identity* and *Transition*.
21. **Straight Ally:** Someone who is not LGBT, but advocates for the fair treatment of LGBT people.
22. **Transgender*:** Often an umbrella term including transsexuals, cross-dressers, as well as people who identify as neither male nor female. Can also be the preferred self-identifier for someone who feels their gender identity differs from their birth-assigned gender or sex, but who does not wish to transition.
23. **Transition:** The process by which a person who identifies as transgender or transsexual changes their sex and gender. Can include changing name/ and or sex on legal documents, hormone therapy, living as the opposite gender or sex for an extended period of time, Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). Not all transgender/transsexual people choose to transition, or may choose some, but not all, of the options related to transition (an FtM or MtF may choose hormonal therapy but never have Sex Reassignment Surgery).

24. **Transsexual:** A person who does not feel that their birth-assigned sex matches their internal sense of their sex. Transsexuals may be male-to-female (MtF) or female-to-male (FtM). Transsexuals may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally or surgically. Some transsexuals also identify as transgender. See *Transgender* and *Transition*.
25. **Transvestite:** Considered a pejorative term when used to describe someone who is a Cross-Dresser. See *Cross-Dresser*.
26. **Two-Spirit:** The preferred self-identifier of many contemporary gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Native Americans.
27. **Queer:** An umbrella term used for anything not heterosexual. Historically has been considered pejorative; however the term has recently been reclaimed by some LGBT people as a preferred self-identifier as well as an adjective (i.e. *Queer Politics*, *Queer Studies*). Some LGBT people do not like the word Queer.

***HOW DO I DEAL WITH A TRANSGENDER PERSON?**

(from Gender 101: A Transgender Primer by Alexander John Goodrum)

It is extremely important to refer to a TG person by the pronoun appropriate to their presented gender. In other words, if someone identifies as female, then refer to them as she; if they identify as male, refer to them as *he*. If you are not sure, ASK them what they want. Once you know, be as consistent as possible. It's okay if you forget or slip up once in a while. Nevertheless, it is very important to make the effort. **Never** use the word "it" when referring to someone who is transgender, either in their presence or to others when they are not present. To do so is incredibly insulting and disrespectful.

Do not "out" someone (tell others that they are TG) without his or her permission. Also, do not assume that everyone knows. Some TG people "pass" very well and the only way someone would know would be if they were told. The decision to tell someone about their gender issues should be left to the TG person themselves.

Never ask a TG person how he or she has sex or what their genitals look like. That is inappropriate in every situation (You would never ask a non TG person what his or her genitals look like or how they have sex). Do not assume a TG person is straight. Do not assume they are gay, lesbian or bisexual, either.

For additional information, contact Wingspan, Southern Arizona's LGBT Community Center
300 East Sixth Street
Tucson, Arizona 85705-8426
520-624-1779
www.wingspan.org